

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

TO: CHAIR
HUMAN SERVICES

FROM: ARTHUR E. GIRDWOOD JR. (P)

DATE: JANUARY 9, 2007

EXHIBIT 11

DATE 1-10-07

HR 2

MADAM CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

I AM ARTHUR E GIRDWOOD JR. FROM SAND COULEE MT., HOUSE DISTRICT 19. I'M A PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST AND A MEMBER OF THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE FOR THE CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN GREAT FALLS. I AM A FATHER OF 6, AND AN EX-LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER. I HAD A SEVERE NERVOUS BREAK-DOWN 16+ YEARS AGO. THIS BEGAN MY LIFE OF LIVING WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS. AN ILLNESS I WAS TOLD THERE WOULD BE NO HOPE FOR ANY RECOVERY IN MY LIFE.

I HAD GIVEN UP ALL HOPE AND STARTED DETERIORATING VERY QUICKLY AFTER MY LAST CHILD LEFT HOME LAST YEAR. SO, I WAS ADVISED TO TAKE A NEW CLASS CALLED WRAP- (WELLNESS RECOVERY ACTION PLAN). IT HELPED. BUT I NEEDED MORE.

I THEN TO THE PEER EMPLOYMENT CLASS. I FOUND NEW HOPE, WAS EMPOWERED AND CREDIT IT FOR PUTTING ME ON COURSE FOR MY OWN RECOVERY. I FEEL A TRUE CALLING TO THIS PROGRAM. I ALWAYS WANTED TO DO SOMETHING WITH ALL MY EXPERIENCES AND THE KNOWLEDGE I'VE LEARNED IN THE LAST 16 YEARS. AND NOW I CAN. THIS PROGRAM ALLOWS ME TO FEEL "ALIVE" ONCE MORE. NOW I'M EMPLOYED, A TAX-PAYER; HELPING OTHERS: PEER IS THE FUTURE.

~~THANK YOU~~ CONTINUED ON BACK.

I'VE BEEN EMPLOYED, PART-TIME, FOR THE CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH FOR 1 MONTH. SINCE THEN I HAD A WALK-IN WHO WAS SUICIDAL AND ANOTHER BROUGHT IN BY ITS CASE-WORKER, IN DEPRESS AND NEAR SUICIDE DUE TO A FAILED RELATIONSHIP. BOTH HAPPENED JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS. I WAS ABLE TO HELP BOTH AND EMPOWERED THEM TO TAKE BACK CONTROL OF THEIR LIVES, WHICH AT THE TIME, WERE SPIRALING OUT OF CONTROL. AS A RESULT, NEITHER ENDED UP IN THE EMERGENCY ROOM, NOR DID THEY NEED TO BE SENT TO WARM SPRINGS.

THIS PROGRAM WORKS VERY WELL AND IT IS EXCITING TO WATCH IT IN ACTION. IT'S UNSCRIPTED BUT AT TIMES ALMOST SEEMS AS THOUGH IT WAS SCRIPTED RIGHT OUT OF TRAINING. PEER SUPPORT IS POWERFUL AND SPREADING THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS, NATIONWIDE. IT'S AN ^{HONOR} TO BE A PART OF THE GRASSROOTS OF THIS PROGRAM BEGINNING IN MONTANA. I'M READY TO SEE AND TAKE IT TO ITS NEXT LEVEL AND ULTIMATE CONCLUSION.

THANK YOU